



An Overview of Cruise Ship Management in Glacier Bay

By David Nemeth and Kevin Apgar

Introduction

What could be simpler than to manage cruise ships in Glacier Bay? No docking and no shore excursions, just hundreds of thousands of park visitors leaving nothing behind but the gentle lapping of the ships wake, shimmering in the setting sun. If that was ever the view of park managers, it did not last long, as is evidenced by some of the research described in this issue. As you will see, management of cruise ships in Glacier Bay is anything but simple.

Cruise Ship Quotas

Since 1980, cruise ships have been limited to a maximum of 2 ships per day, year round, and to further limitations during the prime season, June 1 to August 31. In 1981, the cruise ship prime season quota was reduced 20% (from 107 to 89) based on concerns over the impact of cruise ships and other vessels on the endangered humpback whale and a related National Marine Fisheries Service biological opinion. There were further prime season quota adjustments in 1985 (102), in 1988 (107), 1996 (139), 2001 (130), 2002 (back to 139), and in 2007, to the current level of 153.

The 2003 Vessel Quotas and Operating Requirement Environmental Impact Statement added a separate seasonal quota of 92 cruise ship entries for

May and September, but allows for an increase to 122 (maximum of two per day). About 70 “shoulder season” entries are scheduled each year, which is well below the quota that has remained unchanged.

Management

Management of cruise ship services has evolved largely in concert with nationwide changes in NPS management of commercial visitor services, with some idiosyncrasies related to the unique nature of these services. Formal permits to the cruise ship companies authorizing their activities were first issued in 1980, essentially grandfathering in the existing cruise lines.

Cruise ship services in Glacier Bay are atypical concession operations in many respects. For example, virtually all of the ships are of foreign registry, most employees on-board are not citizens of the United States, and insurance practices are based primarily on maritime laws and practice. The State of Alaska, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Maritime Commission are just a few of the government agencies who have primary responsibilities for oversight of cruise ship operations in U.S. waters. Park management of cruise ship services must take into consideration not only the specific mandate to protect park resources and provide for visitor enjoyment, but also consider the broader legal and regulatory framework under which cruise ships operate.

There are several federal laws related to cruise ship services that are specific to Glacier Bay. These include:

- PL 110-161 Sec. 134, which provides Holland America Line and Princess Cruises the right to

continue providing cruise ship services non-competitively, based on use levels prior to 1979.

- PL 104-333 Sec. 703, which limits park authority to impose operating conditions in the areas of air, water, and oil pollution beyond those enforced by other appropriate agencies.

The competitive process used in the award of concession contracts has provided an effective means for the NPS to achieve environmental goals without “imposing operating conditions” prohibited under PL 104-333. Concession contracts authorizing cruise ship services for 2010 through 2019 were recently awarded through a competitive selection process. Companies competed for a contract as well as a fixed number of entries.

Selection criteria included:

1. protection of park resources – air quality, water quality, and underwater sound,
2. the itinerary while in the park and the on-board interpretive program,
3. experience, including past violations and accidents,
4. financial capability,
5. offers of a higher franchise fee, and
6. other environmental issues, including minimizing waste and hazardous materials use.

In 2009, Princess Cruises submitted a proposal that was judged to be the best of six from companies competing for contracts, and Princess was allocated 58 trips, 32 of them under historical rights. Princess proposed the

Figure 1. Cruise ship at Margerie Glacier.

NPS photograph by Tom Vandenberg

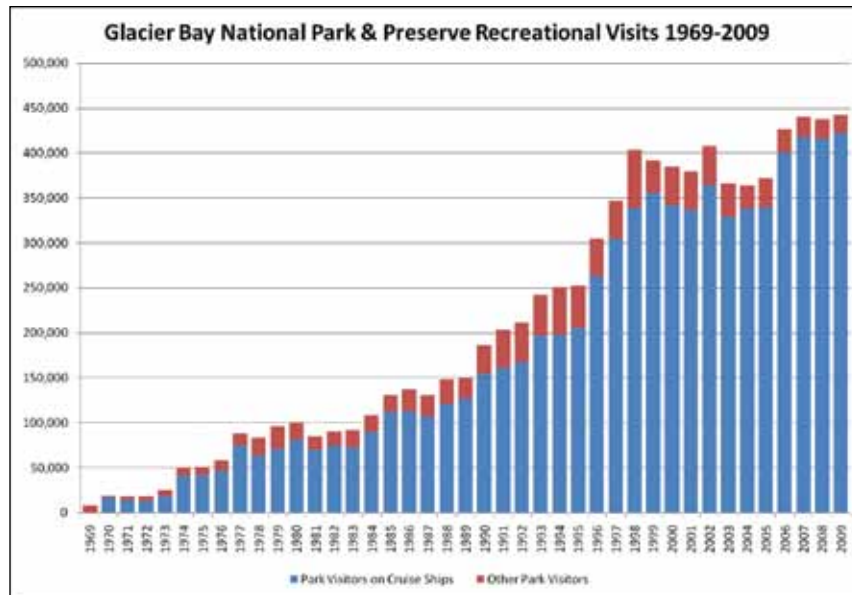


Figure 2. Glacier Bay recreational visits.

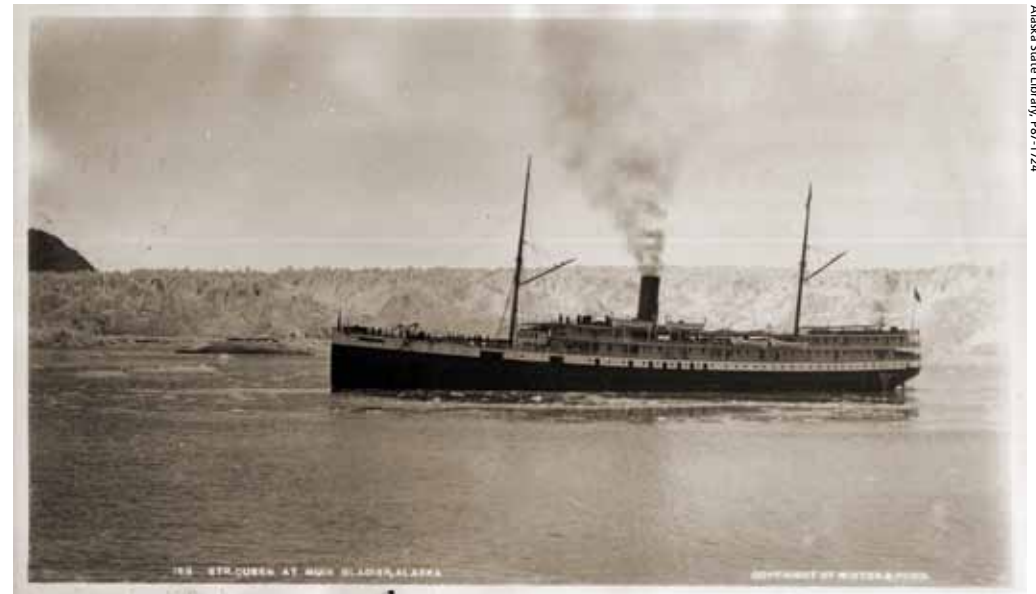


Figure 3. Steamer *Queen* at Muir Glacier.

use of turbine engines, low sulfur distillate fuel and other strategies for reducing air pollution and a “no discharge” policy to minimize water pollution in Glacier Bay. They committed to underwater sound signature testing, developed a “whale strike avoidance program,” offered a number of enhancements to the interpretive/educational program focused on Glacier Bay, and proposed a franchise fee of \$12 per passenger, \$5 above the minimum. The remaining contracts and trips were awarded to Holland America Line (65, of which 39 were under historical rights), Cruise West (8), and Norwegian Cruise Line (22).

One key point is that the cruise operators voluntarily proposed elements to minimize impacts in the areas of air, water, and oil pollution as part of a competitive selection process, and the NPS accepted the elements which, in its judgment, would minimize impacts in the areas of air, water, and oil pollution. These elements proposed by the operators were added to their final concession contracts, but NPS did not impose operating conditions in the areas of air, water,

and oil pollution beyond those enforced by other appropriate agencies, as prohibited under PL 104-333.

Visitor Experience and the Interpretive Program

From the late 1960s to the 1980s a day on a cruise ship in Glacier Bay was much the same as the days spent outside the park, organized around games such as bingo, auctions, dance lessons, life boat drills, gambling and meals. Today, the day in the park is organized to showcase the significant resources and purpose of the park, while minimizing competition from unrelated activities. The cruise ship itinerary is a significant element in ensuring that passengers have a reasonable opportunity to enjoy, learn about and experience the park. A good itinerary helps promote a positive visitor experience; a poor itinerary undermines it. As with impacts to air, water and oil pollution, the competitive selection process was used to encourage operators to suggest optimal itineraries for the day spent in the park.

In 1969 Park Ranger Bruce Paige climbed aboard the

m/v Mariposa to provide visitors with information about the park, initiating a program that now forms the backbone of the park interpretive operation. The NPS considers it essential that cruise ship visitors to Glacier Bay be given an opportunity to learn about the area during their visit. In furtherance of this, cruise lines are given the option of providing their own interpretive program, meeting NPS minimum standards, or utilizing an NPS interpretive program on a cost recovery basis. To date, all cruise lines have elected to participate in the NPS program. The NPS program consists of live on-board commentary over the ship’s public address system, formal auditorium programs, special children’s programs and activities, scheduled special interest events, informal question and answer opportunities and access to park reference materials through Alaska Geographic, a non-profit cooperating association. The total (2010) program cost is about \$660,000 or about \$1.58 per passenger. In addition, through the competitive selection process, operators proposed enhancements to the NPS interpretive program, including supplemental

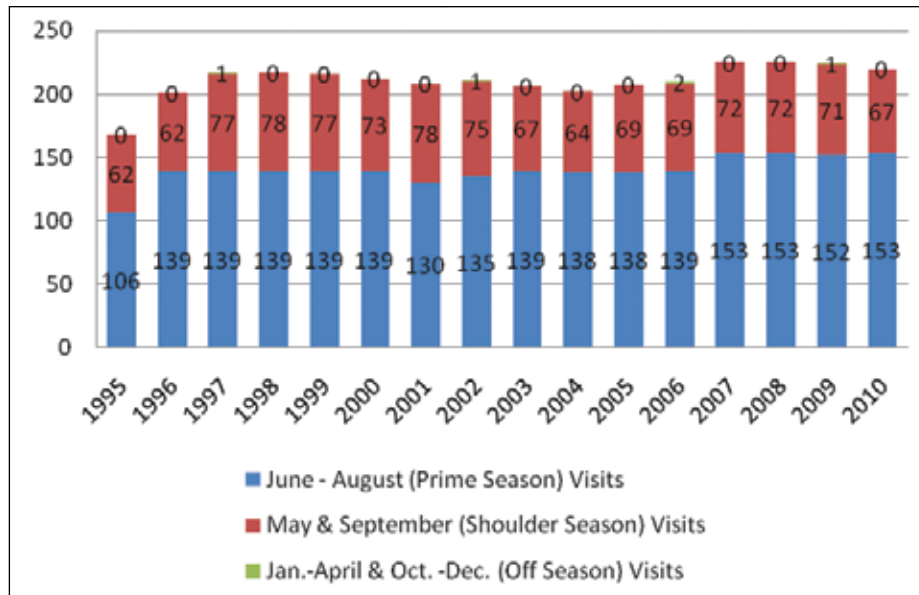


Figure 4. Glacier Bay cruise ship visits during 1995-2010.



Figure 5. Norwegian Pearl in Glacier Bay.

pre-visit lectures, videos, podcasts and cultural programs.

Operations

In addition to general operational requirements imposed by state and federal agencies, cruise lines are also subject to park specific regulations as well as each operator's specific concession contract provisions. Park regulations are available at <http://www.nps.gov/glba/parkmgmt/regs.htm> (36 CFR Part 13, Subpart N). Each of the cruise ship concession contracts are available at: <http://www.nps.gov/glba/parkmgmt/cruise-ships.htm>.

Cruise ships are also subject to the regulatory vessel speed limits in "whale waters", exclusions from areas closed to motor vessels, and approach limits to specific islands important for bird nesting and sea lion haul-out.

Compliance

The NPS supplements the work of lead agencies, such as the U.S. Coast Guard and the State of Alaska, in moni-

toring concessioner compliance with general regulatory requirements. For example, park staff monitor cruise ship exhaust stack opacity based on assimilated State of Alaska air quality statutes (*Alaska 18AAC50, 2005*). Park staff also work with the State of Alaska Ocean Ranger Program, which is funded by a passenger "head tax", to insure that special requirements for Glacier Bay are among the areas monitored by the technical specialists ("Ocean Rangers").

Fees

The first cruise ship permits in 1980 required payment of a total fee of \$25 per vessel entry. The required fee was increased over the years to a minimum of \$7 per person for the 2010 concession contracts. An offer of a higher fee was also a selection factor in the competitive award of cruise ship contracts and use days. Three of the cruise lines offered \$12 per passenger, which the NPS accepted. Eighty percent of this money, which totaled nearly \$5 million dollars in 2010, is retained by the park and used to pay for park operations, including resource manage-

ment, research and other park programs. The other 20% is retained by the Washington D.C. office of the NPS and distributed throughout the national park system.

Conclusion

Cruise ship management in Glacier Bay has evolved significantly over the last 40 years, driven by new laws and regulations, better understanding of potential impacts and through positive partnerships with the cruise industry. In addition, the competitive process for allocating cruise ship services has been a successful tool for minimizing cruise ship air, water, and oil pollution, improving the visitor experience on the ships, and through franchise fees providing funds for resource management, research and other park programs.